

From La Belle Assemblée.

SCOTLAND'S FAIREST AND BRAVEST.

BY MISS INGRAM.

— And let me tell thee tales
Of woful ages, long ago betid.

SHAKESPEARE.

"How else shall I prove that my love for thee is boundless?" uttered an impassioned tongue to a very fair and lovely girl, who had turned scornfully away as the speaker concluded a former whispered sentence.

"By doing my bidding, my Lord of Athole," she now replied, in a haughty tone.

"Ay, sweet Annie; but hast thou considered how difficult the task imposed?—to cease gazing on thee, when every feature is beauty's own—to leave thee, while yet there are words on my tongue to tell thee all I would brave for thy love. Indeed, Annie, I cannot leave thee while there is yet one of hope's bright sparks in my bosom."

"Then I would I could pluck it thence, Sir Knight."

"Nay, thou canst not. List while yet again I recount all I would do for one of thy heart-cheering smiles. Have not I told thee, dearest, that thy father should be soon again by his own dearly loved child—on the hills of wild Liddesdale! Then, too, would I gather round me thrice the number of brave hearts and strong swords (even including the renowned Dalwolsy, lady) which thy sire owns.—Annie Douglas, I would join thy brave father's followers: his wrongs should be mine."

"Again, Sir Knight!" she exclaimed in an offended tone; "dost thou again offend my ears with thy base proffers? Thinkest thou that the proving traitor to the cause thou hast chosen would win my favour? I will no longer listen to thee. And for the liberating Liddesdale's Lord, learn, Sir Knight, that his followers have proffered his ransom, and in a few days thou mayest call all the strength thou hast vaunted to thy aid, for they need it who raise their arm 'gainst his.'"—

She was interrupted by the unexpected sound of horses' hoofs which seemed to be fast approaching the valley in which they stood. "'Tis some one of our followers, my Lord of Athole," she continued; "I would warn you to begone!"

"But, dearest, first tell me that thou wilt think favourably of the risk I have run to gaze on the famed flower of wild Liddesdale."

"I will converse with thee no longer. Farewell, my Lord," she replied.

Athole placed his foot in the stirrup, and vaulted gracefully into the saddle, waved a kiss on the breeze, exclaiming, "Adieu! my pretty wild flower; I will yet win thy love;"—then, spurring the gay steed, was lost to sight ere the other horseman was seen as a black speck on the hill top. For some minutes Annie stood vacantly

gazing on the lessening figure of Athole, and thinking on the traitorous proposals he had made her; but now the hasty approach of the other roused her from her reverie. "'Tis De Vipont, with news of my father, or commands from him," she murmured: "but no; 'tis a stranger, and young and handsome, too. Perhaps he is of England's friends; and here am I alone, and untended.—Oh! there is Scotland's plumed bonnet! doubtless he bears tidings of our troops."

He was even by her side as she concluded; and, instantly leaping from his horse, bent his knee before her, as he exclaimed, "Scotland's pride! Liddesdale's famed one! thou canst be no other.—Tell me, lady, if thou art the envied Annie?"

With a crimsoned cheek and a downcast eye, she replied softly, "I call Liddesdale's Douglas father."

"Then, Annie Douglas, Ramsay of Dalwolsy bears thee a command from his own lips."

"Rise, rise, sir!" she exclaimed hurriedly, and glancing timidly on the fine features raised to her face. "Doth Scotland's bravest kneel before one of her maidens, whom it would better become to hold thy rein while thy foot was in the stirrup? But I had forgotten: thou saidst thou hadst a command from my father. Hast thou, then, spoken with him?"

"Ay, fairest: he is once again come to gladden Scotland with his presence; and in token to thee that my words hold the stamp of truth, I bear thee this ring."

A blush of shame crimsoned even her smooth brow as she gazed on it, and remembered that she had been thus holding converse with a stranger who had but called himself as one of their bravest champions, and for the sincerity of whose words she had required no further proof than a handsome face and frank bearing. But he had called himself by a title which had never been uttered in her presence but in terms of pride and admiration by every noble whose presence had graced the feasts at her own castle home; and unwittingly had she suffered it to become rooted amidst the tenderest feelings in her very soul, till even its mention had banished from her mind every remembrance of maidenly caution and pride, and thrilled to their depths her woman's feelings. "Shame it is to me, Sir Knight," at length she spoke, in a broken voice, "to look on my brave sire's token. Ye can think me but a bauld lassie; and it brings to my sad, sad memory that I have not yet bidden ye to our board, where I, alas! must play the hostess; for my

angel mother rests—my sire, thou knowest, is watching his country's interests."

Dalwolsy joyfully took his horse by the bridle, and led him by the side of Annie, beguiling the way with words: the same she had often heard, but never till then felt. First, though, Douglas' command was Dalwolsy's theme. "Thou must even away with the morrow's dawn, lady," he said; "every vassal must hence to their lord's banner. Then, Annie, thy father thinketh truly, that a scarcely inhabited castle is not a meet place for one like thee."—

"Ramsay," she interrupted, "whither would he send me? See!" pointing to the castle turrets as they rose to view. "I have so long called that home, I should weep to leave it. Nobles have whispered in my ear that other hills are fairer than Liddesdale—that their own castles are more noble than our hermitage, and their vassals braver than the Douglas' followers—but, Sir Ramsay, I have not believed them: tell me, then, whither my honoured sire would will me to go?"

"I must bear thee safely to Kildrummie, lady, where thou wilt be safe, since the stout-hearted Christina Moray defendeth it; and where, moreover, thou wilt be surrounded by some of Scotland's maidens equal in rank to thyself. Think, Annie; dost not thou fancy thy days the merrier already, that thou art going to sojourn in a castle famed for gallantry and mirth?"

"But my mother's grave, Alexander Ramsay?" returned Annie, in a broken, mournful voice, and raising her tearful eyes imploringly. "I am a sad wilful creature, Ramsay; but I ever fly to that tomb of peace when my heart beats too fiercely. I shall leave in our hermitage the only happiness I have known when Liddesdale's Lord was far away in the southern land."

"Thy only happiness, lady!" repeated Ramsay, casting a meaning glance to the hill-top over which Athole had disappeared. "Pardon me; but I had imagined thy happiness was centred in the living rather than the dead."

Annie blushed and smiled as she caught his meaning, and replied, "Ay; thou art fancying yonder gallant was a true-love. He hath said he is."

"And you doubt it?"

"Nay, I know not that I have even thought about it. Tell me, Sir Alexander, wouldst thou—and thou hast boasted over much of bravery and love—wouldst thou ride away at the glimpse of a single horseman?"

"Might I die any where, save on the field of glory, if I did! But, Annie, does your father know this?"

"Know what, Sir Knight? Thinkest thou I would trouble his ear with the trash that Athole's Earl, Scotland's enemy, whisper's in the ear of a Douglas?"

"Athole!" exclaimed Ramsay, with a heightened colour; "by my good sword we will give him other work to do than galloping over our hills in search of our fairest maidens. Annie—young Leddy Douglas—if thou lovest him, tell it not to me, for I have sworn to dip my sword in

his blood, and if such words came from thy lips, I fear me I should be perjured."

Annie gazed with surprise on the glowing eye and perturbed bosom which Ramsay exhibited. "I love him!" she exclaimed, stopping suddenly in her walk; "an' I did, Sir Knight, I would either root it from my bosom, or never again set foot in Liddesdale. But I hate him, Ramsay: his very words and voice are my detestation. But we shall shortly be in the halls of a Douglas, and Athole is not a name to breathe there. Rather let its walls resound in honour of its guest."

Ramsay forgot not to repay her words in kind; and their effect may be best judged from the knowledge that, at the next morning's dawn, he was plighting and receiving vows of faith at her mother's grave ere they began their journey towards Kildrummie. Annie was attended by her maidens, and Dalwolsy led a troop of the bravest hearts in Liddesdale. It will not be surprising, then, to learn, that it was a mirthful train which wended its way towards the castle; but as they neared it their spirits flagged, the mirthful joke grew less frequent 'mongst the men and maidens, and Annie and Dalwolsy seemed deeply buried in thought. "Do not the horses grow weary?" spoke Annie, after a long silence, during which she had imagined their pace to slacken.

"No, dearest," replied Ramsay; "they are but too ready to bear thee on. Thy father is awaiting me—my country calls me; I may not then even allow my heart to guide me, or I should say it were necessary to rest even here. But look thee, Annie; yonder turret is Kildrummie, and there we must part; but we meet again, love, ere long. Wilt thou give me a golden tress to bear to thy father as a token of thy love when I shall ask thee of him?"

"Take forth thy sword, Ramsay, and cut it from 'neath my hood;—but stay: 'tis a work unfitting the dread of England: call one of the vassals hither, and use his less valued weapon." But Ramsay cut the bright lock even whilst she spoke, and placed it 'neath the folds of his vest.

They were now called on from the walls of Kildrummie in a deep masculine tone, but which, to Annie's surprise, proceeded from one of her own sex. "the heroic Christina Moray," who was summoning the numerous sentinels to their posts. Dalwolsy was admitted on the instant with the young Lady Douglas and her maidens; but the former staid only to repeat that Annie was committed to her guardianship by the flower of Scottish chivalry, to receive a gracious promise of protection from the Lady Moray, and perhaps the lingering farewell of one other, ere, placing his bonnet on his brow, he was bowing gracefully on his steed as he led his little band on their now weary march.

Annie stood silently by the side of her brave hostess, but quite unconscious of such presence, for her eyes were fixed on the lessening plume which was tossed to and fro in the varying breezes.

"Annie Douglas," at length interrupted the Lady Moray, "dost thou see yonder cloud of dust,

which groweth even more dense with every passing moment? Thou dost!—then, maiden, I will tell thee we are not calling every hand to its post for mere pastime. That mist by every probability, circles foes!—thou startest!—Nay, thou hast but a weakly heart for the bride of a soldier."

Annie's eye sank beneath the keen glance of the Lady Moray; and she wondered, in her simplicity, how she could have learned aught that had passed between her and Ramsay; but, "Annie Douglas," she continued with a kindly smile, and parting the long golden ringlets from the downcast cheek, "dost thou think that Dalwolsy's eyes speak a language unintelligible to all, save thee? and that thy smile can be read alone by him? No, no; remember, for the future, that others than thyself have eyes. But go within, and throw thyself on a velvet couch, and dream again each look and word and sigh, while we deal with more substantial matter. Within with thee! within!"

Annie was not disinclined, after her fatigues, to profit by the request of her kind protectress, who now accompanied her to a chamber, where she ranged her maidens round her, and was soon again in the little chapel of Liddesdale, with Dalwolsy plighting his faith at her side.

Meantime Athole's Earl had not been idle. He had contrived to be an unobserved spectator of the meeting between Annie and Dalwolsy, whom he had recognized by his plumed bonnet and gay bearing, by merely riding round the hill's side, and coming again even within a few paces of where they stood. He watched Annie's blushes, listened to the words of kindness which fell from her lips, and the homage paid her by Dalwolsy. When they moved thence, he hastily drew from his saddle's bow a small bundle, which, it seemed, contained the dress of Liddesdale's vassals: this he quickly donned; and, taking a different route, arrived at the castle long before those who had loitered so willingly on the way. He then bent his steps to an outer wall, where it appeared he was expected; for a very pretty but simple-looking girl returned his salutation, adding, that he was a "tardy callant."

"Nay, Jeanie, then I must ask forgiveness. I have been spending my time on my master's business; but each moment was an hour ere I could reach thee;" and he passed his arm tenderly round her waist. "Thou needest not to hasten home, for thy mistress is beguiling her evening walk by listening to words which are honeyed to her ear as thine to mine. Thou wilt go hence many a weary mile to-morrow. Listen, Jeanie: my master loveth thy mistress even as I do thee; it needeth not better: but he is not happy as I am, Jeanie; thou knowest that she has scorned his suit, though he hath risked so much to come hither just to gaze on a bright eye. He hath braw lands, which she might call her ain, and siller sufficient to purchase half Scotland, and 'tis thy lord's pleasure that she should love him; but the Douglas has sent hither one to bear her to a far-awa castle for protection; and this one she will love, despite my lord and yours, if

some measure be not taken to make her Countess Athole quickly."

"Ay, interrupted the maiden; "but maybe my young leddy loes anither far, far better."

"A woman's suggestion—or, rather," said he, checking the impatient tone with which he began, "I own that thou showest a kindly heart. But I tell thee this is a mere momentary fancy, just to be perverse: this Dalwolsy will be off to the wars, and forget that ever he set foot on land of Liddesdale."

"But how to bring her to consent to such a measure?"

"Hast not thou some token which thou couldst give my master, and which might come from her father?—nay, there is nought in those words to make my Jeanie start. The lady Annie will soon acknowledge that we have planned her happiness."

"But I fear me!"—

"What shouldst thou fear," he interrupted, "when my arm encircles thee? Bethink thee of something which may serve for my master, and I must away quickly, though to meet thee again shortly, when I hope I may serve under our mutual lords."

The thoughts which crept over the maiden's heart at this suggestion completed all he had wished: she turned hastily to him, and replied, "There is her mother's portrait which my lord ever carries with him when he gangs far awa with the sodger lads; but he was roused so hastily this last call, that he left it in the closet: if thy lord take that, she will credit the token."

"'Tis well, dearest; haste thee, and bring it hither:" then, as she left his side, murmured, "A blessing on thee for a kind-hearted wench! Methinks I have the haughty Annie in my toils now. What a fool am I thus to intrigue for a wild though beautiful flower, when a whole parterre of richer ones are spread for my choosing! But she hath scorned me: that is sufficient to decide her mine.—Ah! my pretty Jeanie!" as the girl approached with the portrait, "there is not another like thee in broad Scotland. For the present I must away, but in a few days we meet again; and, having placed it in his bosom, and pressed a kiss fraught with deceit on her lip, he remounted his horse and galloped off.

But Jeanie, the simple, kind-hearted Jeanie, stood gazing after him with all the yearning of woman's affection in her tearful eye and pallid cheek; and she placed every confidence in the completion of her lady's happiness, since it was an earl who was to wed her, and to bring so many, or at least one brave heart (so she fancied), to the standard of her lord.

But now to return to Annie Douglas, who, perfectly unconscious of all that had passed in that meeting, was fondly dreaming of other and more-valued presence, when she was aroused by the Lady Moray's hand placed lightly on her cheek. "I have dismissed thy maidens, love, for the Earl of Athole waits on thee. Ay; I was wrong in conjecturing that enemies approached. See, dear," as Strathbogie entered, "he wears

the dress which best becomes all who own hearts of steel. But I prevent his delivering thee a bidding from thy father."

"From my father!" repeated Annie. "Nay, my lady, I must have other proof of it than mere words."

Athole's tongue burned to tell her that she did not ever give her thoughts thus quickly to ascertain such truths; but he dared not give the thought utterance now. He drew forth the portrait, and placed it before the astonished but instantly convinced Annie. "Then I am to welcome a friend of Liddesdale's Lord, Sir Knight: believe me, as such thou art most welcome." These few words she uttered with the most complacent air, to atone for the suspicion her first had evinced.

"Such welcome from thy lips, lady," he returned sorrowfully, and with the utmost respect, "were enough to repay me, even though I had lost honour in the exchange, instead of gained it. But I will endeavour to remember the lesson so lately learned," and he bowed lowly to her. "But I bear thee a message and bidding—thou canst not dispute their truth. I am but sorry, An—lady, that my words require aught to certify them as such to thy ear." Then turning a flushed cheek to the surprized Lady Moray, "Hath our brave Dalwolsy left here?"

"Ay, Sir Athole. I would he had tarried to welcome thee to Scotland's glory," returned the animated Christina.

"'Twould have increased my present happiness, doubtless, lady," said the wily earl; "but since he hath left, the bidding I bore him rests with me. Young ledly, thou must hence to thy father; and I wish, since I hear it is thine, that one other had been here to be thy escort."

"Thou meanest our Ramsay, my lord. By my sword, Athole, thou hast a discerning eye. Ay, Annie, 'tis a deep-dyed blush thine." The Lady Moray spoke truly. Annie's cheek burned in its depth of crimson as she turned it from the jealous eye fixed on it; but which grew softened in smiles as he smothered the tumultuous throbbings of love and hatred in his bosom, and in a winning and respectful tone he asked when the Leddy Annie would be prepared to depart?

She gazed long and earnestly on the beauteous portrait before her, as if tracing in its placid smile an approval or disapproval of this sudden and (to her) inexplicable bidding; for she felt, though she knew not why, with such a token, a distrust for which she blamed herself, even while unable to repress the fast-falling tears.

"How's this, Annie Douglas?" demanded the Lady Moray; "doest thou hesitate to join thy father? Maybe, thou faint-hearted one, thou fearest the sound of clashing swords and the battle-call?"

"No, no, indeed no, lady. But 'tis rarely I gaze on these features without giving way to this weakness," said Annie: then, for the first time raising her eyes to Athole's, she continued, "My lord, I 'tend your pleasure."

"Then so soon as the sun's bright heralding crimson is in the east, we will away."

"And now to the banquet hall, Strathbogie," interrupted Lady Moray: "we will summon minstrelsy, and pass in friendly converse and mirthful laugh some of the few intervening hours."

And at the morning's dawn Annie and her maiden's were mounted ready for the journey, during which Athole preceded them by some paces, the little band of soldiers bringing up the rear. They were fast approaching the forest of Kilblene, where they were first to halt, and as yet the silence was unbroken. Annie was not a little surprized to see a regularly encamped army, though small in number; and her heart failed her as she noted that the officer who approached her wore the military dress of England, as indeed did all, saving the few accompanying Athole. She and her train were immediately conducted to a tent prepared for her reception; and to which Athole soon sent, requesting permission to speak in private with her. Her heart misgave her, when, bidding her favourite attendant alone remain with her, she awaited the entrance of Athole.

It was not long ere he stood by her side. The respect hitherto displayed in his every word and action seemed to have suddenly disappeared, and to have given way to a self-satisfied and almost exulting air, and the composure of his countenance to a supercilious smile. He, too, now wore the English dress.

"My Lord of Athole," said Annie, in answer to his request that they might be quite alone, "you can have nought to say which may not as well reach the ear of my confidential maiden as"—But she was interrupted by the girl shrinking on her knees before her, pale, and shutting her eyes as Athole's were bent on her, his lip vainly endeavouring to give his rage utterance, as he recognized Jeanie! "Lady, lady," she exclaimed in an agonized tone, "listen not to him!—bid him leave thee, and I will tell thee all!—how silly I have been, how base he!—all, all!"—and she sank fainting at her mistress's feet. "The wench is riven of her senses, young lady," said Athole bitterly, as Annie gazed on the lifeless girl with the utmost astonishment; then, as she summoned her other attendants, he bowed and left the tent.

She was now convinced that there was treachery in the proceedings; but hour after hour passed, and still Jeanie lay in the same unconscious state. Suddenly the battle-cry was raised, and Annie was despatching a messenger to learn the reason, when Athole, with a flushed cheek and hurried manner, rushed into her presence, "Annie Douglas!" he exclaimed, throwing his battle-cloak around her, "we are surrounded by enemies. I will not leave thee here to become the bride of the hated Ramsay. I belong not to thy boasted Scotland. And listen: if I live and conquer now, thou shalt away with me to England; if I die, thou diest too!"

But Annie heard not the threat, for she was lying, a death-like paleness on her lips and face, in his arms; and he was bearing her to his own steed. Then as he clasped her with one arm, the other outstretched sword in hand, he touched the rock which stood beside him, and swore to be victorious or die. His soldiers were dropping around him as each arrow whistled down from the eminence whereon the enemy stood, and upon which Athole had fixed a glassy stare, for he recognized, in the tartans and plumes waving to and fro in the breeze, Dalwolsy and Douglas of Liddesdale.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "have you learned that Athole bears the prize? Dearest," as he turned to the beautiful being he grasped in his hated embrace, and pressing her cold lips to his, "we part not." An arrow was shot from a bow which

was stretched over the precipice, and Athole fell: another followed it,—Annie was bleeding by his side. With the agony returned consciousness: and when she raised her eyes, Alexander Ramsay's arms were around her, while her father and maidens were weeping beside him: but Ramsay's eye was tearless, though his soul was bitterness itself. His bosom, which was heaving tumultuously, alone betrayed the inward workings of his spirit, as he gasped out, "Annie, my affianced bride, 'twas my hand laid that dastard low, and my hand—but, oh! how unwittingly!—stretched thee by his side. Stay, stay, dearest! one word—forgiveness!"

She raised her head for one moment, and pressed her lips on the icy hand supporting it; then, raising her eyes to her father, and smiling on him, she drooped in death.